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Our slavery to God is the greatest and most joyful sort of freedom. Our freedom makes us willingly submit to the needs of others and count them better than ourselves.

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FROM BAPTISM TO BATTLE

YOUR DRAFT NOTICE

He wore a blue coat, a red bow tie, and a white top hat rimmed with stars. His whiskered face looked down from many a poster on the wall and said, "I want YOU for the U. S. Army. Enlist now!" With those words, Uncle Sam summoned a generation of men to come and fight in World War I and again in World War II. Young men were still being drafted during the Vietnam War. Some of them decided to "dodge" the draft and flee to Canada. Those who stayed and obeyed were enlisted, trained, and thrown into battle.

In the same way, and with the same urgency, Jesus calls for "a few good men." Women and children too! Baptism is our draft notice, our summons to spiritual warfare. Christian churches are the recruitment centers and the bases where we come for "basic training." Make no mistake -- this is not a game. A real and deadly war is upon us. Ready or not, all who heed the call of their baptism will be plunged into battle.

Romans 6 describes the Christian life as the journey from the draft notice of our baptism to the battle we must wage against the sin that once held us captive. In vivid language, Paul underlines the importance of that Sacrament and the nature of the battles we face. *We are Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before.* (LSB #662). Even as we march, we sing for we know the battle is won. Life eternal is ours!

BAPTIZED: WE'VE ALREADY DIED!*ROMANS 6:1-4*

Chapters 5-8 explore the implications of being God's justified people. To move us forward, Paul begins Chapter 6 with a probing question: "What shall we say then?" He asked the same question at the beginning of Chapter 4. He will ask it again in 7:7, 8:31, 9:14 and 9:30. To put it in everyday language, Paul keeps asking, "Now that God has given us His righteousness, what are we going to do about it?" It's the sort of question we ought to ask ourselves after every sermon we hear. God has gone to great lengths to declare us justified. What happens next?

"Are we to continue in sin?" (v. 1). That may seem a preposterous suggestion, but it's precisely the approach of many soft, spiritually lazy people who want to think of themselves as Christians but exert no effort in their "discipleship." They are at ease in their habitual wrongdoing. How would you answer a person who said, "I like to sin and God likes to forgive. It's a good arrangement"?

In his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer contended against this very idea among believers in Germany prior to World War II. He called it "cheap grace," the notion that a person can say "I'm a Christian" and yet everything can go on just as it was before. Borrowing language from Paul, he said it amounted to "justification of sin rather than the justification of the sinner"!

Are we to continue in sin? Paul wastes no time answering: "By no means!" (v. 2). The Greek is very strong language, akin to our profane expression, "Hell no!" The reason for his answer is that we "died to sin" (v. 2). Note that Paul does not say we "ought to" die to sin. No. It has already happened. The deed has been done. There has in fact been a profound change (a dying!) that necessitates a different life. A war on sin has been declared.

"When did that happen?" you ask. Paul now takes the role of a kindly father explaining this as if to young children. "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" (v. 3). Those inclined to consider baptism symbolic must reckon with the graphic words of this verse: "we were buried...with him by baptism into death" (v. 4). "By baptism"! Baptism is more than a ritual or a symbol. It buries us. Then calls us into a new life. We are "dead to" our former way of living.

“Into death.” Into “newness of life.” The preposition is “into.” Jesus uses the same preposition when commanding His followers to baptize “into the name” (Matt. 28:19). The preposition describes a movement, a change of one’s place and situation. All of which tells us we are not to simply lie down and submit in the face of sin. We are called to war. Paul Revere summoned “the country folk to be up and to arm” against the British. We are on a mission, not to fight the British, but to “put to death...what is earthly” (Col. 3:5) inside of us! This war will take place “in your mortal body” (v. 12).

BAPTIZED: I’M ALIVE AGAIN!

ROMANS 6:5-10

We enter this warfare by dying a death that frees us to serve a new commander in chief.

Having died with Him, we are now “alive to God in Christ Jesus” (v. 11). We see another preposition in focus. Five times in verses 5-8 comes the preposition “with.” We are “united with him in a death like his” and “united with him in a resurrection like his” (v. 5). Our old self was “crucified with him” (v. 6). We have “died with Christ,” and we believe that we “will also live with him” (v. 8). The connection with Him is essential.

That “old” self mentioned in verse 6 we like to call the “Old Adam.” By that, we mean the self in its unregenerate state before we are joined with Christ. Paul never actually employs the term “old Adam,” but it’s a good shorthand way of describing the fix we humans were in ever since Adam’s dreadful fall. We were all taken prisoners of war and held in death’s concentration camp. Christ’s death, mentioned explicitly in verse 10, was the “shot heard round the world.” His death was the first “death...to sin,” which means it severed sin’s hold “once for all” (the Greek word is *ephapax*, a term used only here in Romans) and

liberated us from the death camp. His resurrection sets Him apart from the “raisings” that went before. Jairus’ daughter (Luke 8:41-56), the widow’s son (Luke 7:11-17), and Lazarus (John 11:38-44) were raised, but all had to die again. Not Jesus! He will “never die again” (v. 9).

Something that needs clarifying is the term “set free from sin” (v. 7). That phrase does not mean one never sins again! But it does mean that our cell doors have been unlocked and we are freed to fight “the good fight” (see 2 Tim. 4:7). The continuing nature of that warfare is vividly described in Luther’s answer to “What does... baptizing with water indicate?”

It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.
(Luther’s Small Catechism)

A NEW COMMANDER IN CHIEF

ROMANS 6:11-14

The new soldiers report for duty, for we received orders: “present yourselves to God” (v. 13). Those who have been set free are to respond to their Liberator and give Him their allegiance. Such allegiance is not automatic, not to be taken for granted. Sin is a mighty power, and it seeks daily to regain its old mastery. There is danger for a person who thinks of baptism as a kind of “insurance policy” in his drawer. Baptism is not the end of struggling, but the beginning! It’s the draft notice that calls us to war. “Let not sin... reign” (v. 12) is a verb form that calls for continuing action, a daily resistance movement.

The word “sin” occurs 17 times in this chapter. Did you notice that all those occurrences are in the singular? In this chapter, sin is personified as

a power that “reigns” and can “make [us] obey” (v. 12). It can “have...dominion” (v. 14). To sin, we may be “slaves” (vv. 17, 20) and need to be “set free” (v. 18). It pays deadly “wages” (v. 23). Its power is addictive, a word that reminds us that this mighty enemy can render us helpless. The adjective “mortal” (v. 12) reminds us that our bodies are subject to sin’s dreadful ally, death, in this warfare.

Most of us don’t need to be told about the power of sin. We know what it’s like to be mastered by resentment, or unable to quit our smoking, drinking, or compulsive eating. Too many of us struggle to break free from the hold of our electronic devices. Years ago, this writer attended a circuit pastor’s meeting at which our host for the day abandoned the agenda and pleaded for our help. “I am struggling with alcohol,” he told us. “I arrange everything in my life for my next drink. My parishioners don’t know it yet, but I’m afraid they’re going to find out. I can’t go on living like this. Please help me!” The pastors joined to offer that brother our help. Addictive behavior cannot be fought alone any more than a soldier can wage war by himself. Paul is using almost all plural pronouns, for our warfare is conducted as “we” and not simply “me.”

A young man who is drafted into military service cannot stay at home on the couch. He must report to his base for training under one who will be the new commander. Our new “master and commander” is God. Paul directs us to “present” ourselves to Him, not just for an hour a week in church! Basic training follows.

In basic training, a soldier learns to use weapons. The Greek word translated “instruments” (v. 13) can also be rendered “weapons”! The organs (“members”) of the body serve as our weapons or instruments of service. Ears to listen. Mouths to speak helpful words. Hands raised to help. Feet to walk beside someone lonely. Will these bodies of ours be used for “righteousness” or “unrighteousness” (v. 13)? Paul could remember

how he had raised his own hands against the church (Gal. 1:13). What a difference it made for God’s army when Jesus summoned Paul and Paul presented himself for duty! How will you respond to the Lord this week and offer your “weapons” in His service?

A NEW LIFE UNDER GRACE

ROMANS 6:15-23

In verse 15, Paul repeats what he asked to begin the chapter, “What then?” Once more, he has us return to the preposterous suggestion of continuing a life of sin, but now for a different reason. Are we to go on sinning “because we are not under law but under grace”?

Martin Luther watched that kind of libertine attitude grow up among the new “Lutherans” in the congregations that had joined his reform movement. More than once he lamented that, having been freed from the burdens of living under the requirements of the pope, people now used their liberty as license to do as they pleased and live “like pigs” (so he says in the preface to the *Large Catechism*). That attitude had arisen very early in the church’s history at Corinth, where people liked to say, “All things are lawful for me”! (1 Cor. 6:12). The result was a shameful licentiousness. Paul’s retort to them was, “but not all things are helpful...I will not be enslaved by anything.”

What is certain in these verses is that we will all live “under” something. Those who live “under law” live from a sense of guilt. Sin holds them by the nose. Their conscience shouts in their ears, and they respond unhappily, “OK, I guess I have to...” Service under the law is unwilling, resentful. It goes out of its way to discover the least it can do and avoid the “extra mile” (Matt. 5:41) kindnesses that can bless others.

The alternative is to live “under grace.” Because the institution of slavery was so widespread in Rome, Paul sticks with a slavery image to describe this life that we have in Christ. He acknowledges the inherent

dangers in this analogy, which might suggest abuse and degradation. He explains, “I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations” (v. 19). We were all once “slaves...of sin, which leads to death” (v. 16) but now have the blessed new possibility of being “slaves of righteousness” (v. 18).

This is no unhappy and resentful servitude! It is willingly undertaken. “You...have become obedient from the heart” (v. 17). It’s the same spirit demonstrated by many of those who are now in our “all volunteer” army. They’ve signed up, eager to serve, eager to deliver the enemy a blow, eager to contribute to the freedom of their countrymen.

Not license to do wrong, but a joyful willingness to do right is what the freedom of God’s “slaves” is all about! Martin Luther framed it with two paradoxical statements in his tract *The Freedom of the Christian* (1520):

A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.

A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant, subject to all.

Both statements are true at the same time. Our slavery to God is the greatest and most joyful sort of freedom. Our freedom makes us willingly submit to the needs of others and count them better than ourselves (Phil. 2:3).

Consider where these two options lead. Slavery to sin, lived out “under law,” leads inevitably to death (v. 21). Slavery to God, lived out “under grace,” produces a wondrous fruit called “sanctification, and its end, eternal life.” Sanctification, translated “holiness” in the NIV, is God’s goal for His people (1 Thess. 4:3). It has begun through the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus (Heb. 10:14). It is the gift of Christ to His bride, the Church, imparted in the washing of baptism (Eph. 5:25-26), bringing the believer nothing less than Christ Himself (1 Cor. 1:30)! In God’s design, holiness, like a healthy plant, grows ever stronger as He sanctifies us “through and through” (1 Thess. 5:23 NIV).

Which will it be for you? The old slavery to sin, with its “wages” of death (v. 23)? When a boy heard a revival preacher cite this verse, he turned to his buddies: “If the devil ain’t gonna pay no better than that, I ain’t gonna work for him n’more!” That’s the spirit!

God has something far better for us. Not death but life. Not a “wage” but a “free gift” (v. 23). Open your gift today. Let it propel you to present yourself in His service now and always!

PERSONAL APPLICATION

ROMANS 7:1-25

Lord God, I confess that my life is a struggle sometimes. In the midst of it, I ask You to speak to me through Your Word, so that again today I may carry on cheerfully and say a heart-felt "Thanks be to God!" In Jesus' name. Amen.

For Review:

1. Paul (to the Corinthians), Luther, and Bonhoeffer all addressed the temptation to turn Christian freedom into a license to do as one pleased. Review what each said.

2. In lesson 9, we came at the Christian life using the metaphor of military service. What is the draft notice? Who are the soldiers? The commander? The enemy? What are the weapons? What is the final outcome?

Romans 7:1-6

3. As a child, what was your reaction to "rules"? What memorable encounters did you have with rules?

4. Count the number of times the word "law" is used in this chapter. _____

How many of these refer to the "Law of Moses"? _____

To what other things does Paul refer when he uses the word "law"?

5. Paul begins the chapter with a principle about the "lordship [authority] of the Law." What's the principle?

6. What picture does he use to illustrate the principle? What do each of the parts of his picture represent?

Romans 7:7-13

7. What grammatical change do you observe, starting with verse 7 and going through the rest of the chapter?

(hint: look at the pronouns)

8. What is the relationship between the law and sin as spelled out in vv. 7-8?

9. Do you personally find it to be true that when things are forbidden to you, they are more tempting? If yes, how do you explain that phenomenon?

10. What two possible objections does Paul raise and answer in vv. 7 and 13?

11. To whom does “I” refer in v. 7 and following?

Romans 7:14-25

12. Paul speaks of the disparity between the WILL and one’s ACTIONS. Do you personally experience that at this point in your life? If so, give an example of a situation where this conflict happens with you

13. Agree or disagree?

When a person becomes a Christian, things get easier.

14. Luther and others have used the Latin phrase *simul iustus et peccator* (at the same time a “sinner” and “saint”) to describe the Christian life. Do you see yourself as:

___ More a “sinner” ___ More a “saint”

___ Both equally ___ It all depends what day it is!

15. What question is asked, then answered, in vv. 24-25?

Memory Verse Challenge for Chapter 7. Choose one of these:

Romans 7:4 *You also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.*

Romans 7:15 *I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.*

Romans 7:24-25 *Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*